

Chapter 2. Survey Methods

Map Work

The initial planning for the 1996-1997 surveys consisted of examining information collected from previous surveys and prioritizing the needs for additional survey work. Biologists and residents familiar with the county were also consulted to identify potentially significant areas. Previous survey information was accessed through the files and database of the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NC NHP). In some instances a few locations of rare species had been previously identified (Weakley et.al. 1979), but description of the quality and composition of the surrounding habitat was incomplete. In other cases, existing information indicated that potential existed for as-yet-unidentified rare or unusual species (Weakley et.al. 1979).

No previous record of biological survey existed for most of the areas surveyed. Selection of areas with potential for biologically significant features included: identifying areas with unusual topography (e.g., unusually flat, steep, or north-facing slopes) or those containing extensive forested areas on the most recent U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 1:24,000 scale topographic maps; reviewed on recent aerial photographs if required. County soil surveys identify areas with soil types which often support rare plant species or uncommon community types; and geologic maps were also consulted to identify rock outcrops and other features. Special attention was given to areas in the vicinity of known sites with unusual species or natural community types.

Numerous potentially significant sites, ranging in size from several acres to hundreds of acres, were outlined on topographic maps. Collectively, these potentially significant sites covered thousands of acres in the county. Many contained complete stream corridors, upland areas, and wetlands. The potential sites were next compared to maps at the Stokes County tax office to obtain the landowner names and addresses needed to request permission to survey. Letters from the Piedmont Land Conservancy requesting permission to survey were then sent to landowners. Surveys were conducted only on lands where permission was granted. Lands for which the request to survey was denied were not surveyed, therefore perhaps 15% of our target sites remain undocumented. The actual coverage of the county area by the target sites was perhaps 10-20% of the total county land area. There are hopefully, other sites that may present themselves as a result of this Inventory.

Field Work

The majority of the survey work was done on private lands, but some work occurred on municipal lands. Site surveys for plants and natural community types were conducted from March 1996 to July 1997 by Kenneth A. Bridle, Ph.D. for the Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) and Shawn Oakley of the NC NHP. Time was devoted to field work, map work and reporting throughout this period, with the team covering 600 miles of hiking mileage and another